

The Paul Butterfield Blues Band (Elektra)  
by Peter Stone Brown  
10 Stars

Sometime either in the late summer or fall of 1965, the debut of the Paul Butterfield Blues Band appeared on Elektra Records. If my memory serves somewhere on the original cover, it said "Play this record loud." The album helped introduce a lot of people to the world of Chicago Blues. The opening track said it all, a mean tough vocal by Paul Butterfield equaled by the sound of his soaring harp propelled by the speedy guitar licks of Mike Bloomfield which seemed to answer both Butterfield's harp and vocals at every turn. And all this was rocked by the rhythm section of Jerome Arnold on bass and the stunning Sam Lay on drums, both veterans of Howlin' Wolf's band.

It didn't matter that the album was mostly covers with quite a few tributes to Little Walter, Butterfield sang with an undeniable intensity that was consistently matched by every member of his band. Aspiring harp players and guitarist would spend hours figuring out what Butterfield and Bloomfield were doing. And for those who followed this music to the source and eventually decided that the versions of these songs performed by Little Walter and other artists were ultimately preferable, it doesn't diminish the Butterfield Blues Band's accomplishment, because 50 years later this album still holds up as vital, soaring and funky. There is no doubt this album launched hundreds of blues bands both known and unknown, but few of them ever came close to matching the Butterfield Band's soul or impact.